

**Testimony of Joan Churchill, CEO
Community Clinical Services in Lewiston
In Support of LD 1301: “An Act to Improve Access to Preventive, Cost-Saving Dental Services”
Friday, April 21, 2017**

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Joan Churchill and I serve as the CEO of Community Clinical Services (CCS) a local business located in Lewiston. CCS provides high quality, affordable, primary and preventive services to over 15,000 patients from Lewiston/Auburn and surrounding towns. I am here to testify in strong support of LD 1301 because it will allow low income parents and other eligible adults, as well as more children, to get much-needed dental screenings, teeth cleanings, and other low cost, preventive services.

We are a health care business, providing primary care, behavioral health care, and pediatric dental care. However, I see an adult dental benefit as a key economic development investment for the State of Maine. To cost effectively address severe teeth pain for patients without dental insurance, emergency rooms and dentists often pull teeth that can be treated. Maine is primarily a service economy and we need service employees. For our office staff positions, for example, all things being equal, I will hire a person willing to smile over a similar applicant who prefers not to smile because she or he has several teeth missing. Service employees need to be able to smile and provide confident customer service. This bill is an investment in Maine's economic future. It will also help Maine residents to have access to basic oral health services so that there is much less need for treating bad teeth in the first place. Example: me. I was brought up in a poor family without insurance most of my childhood. As a young adult without any insurance or extra money, I had several teeth pulled. As I moved to the middle class, I've had 7 or 8 root canals and bridges to save further loss. My daughter, born into the middle class, has had one small filling in her 29 years. Access to preventative care makes a difference.

CCS provides dental care currently, but we can only do so for children. Unlike other Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in Maine, my organization does not receive operational grant funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC). We are designated as an FQHC Look-alike, requiring us to comply with all the same rules and regulations, but not accessing grant funds. This makes us less able to provide certain health services to our uninsured patients in need of care.

By passing LD 1301, however, you would give us more of an ability to expand our dental services to those adult patients who have health coverage through MaineCare, because we would be paid/reimbursed to provide them. Furthermore, studies have shown that when parents have insurance coverage, they are more likely to make sure their children get in for regular medical and dental visits, (Even more of a reason to support this bill).

You have heard others speak about the potential long-term savings that could be realized if this bill were to pass. As a Health Center affiliated with our local hospital, St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, it seems clear to us that savings would be realized through future reductions in avoidable ED and urgent care visits for dental abscesses, and other acute dental issues. St. Mary's, over the past 16 months, saw 595 patients for dental-related issues, almost half for tooth abscesses with an average charge multiple times over a cleaning. We can prevent unneeded pain at less cost! If you pass LD 1301, more adults and children would have greater access to lower cost, preventive oral health services which will in turn bring many of these unnecessary visits down and save the system money.

For these reasons, I urge you to unanimously support LD 1301. Thank you for your consideration.
Joan Churchill, CEO, Community Clinical Services, 57 Birch Street, Suite 201, Lewiston, ME 04240.
jchurchill@stmarysmaine.com; (207) 513-3897.